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ABSTRACT

The rural Australian recession resulting from lower commodity prices and poor weather conditions raised concerns about how people were coping in the bush. A survey was distributed to all grazing properties in 10 shires of central western Queensland. Of 1,050 surveys distributed, 223 were returned representing 284 families and 914 individuals. Results revealed that many families were not getting by and were in a state of distress, particularly regarding their future prospects. Approximately 65 percent of respondents were living off either savings, overdraft, Job Search Allowance, Household Support or any combination of these. Only a small number of respondents were receiving government support. (Eight percent are receiving Job Search Allowance, Household Support or both). The level of assistance currently being received was minimal, but respondents' requests for assistance were considerable. About half of respondents had school-age children on the property. Forty percent of children were educated at home through the School of Distance Education. The additional work and stress placed on families by drought conditions were eroding time and attention paid to supervising children with school work. About 30 percent of children were attending the nearest school, and a number of these families faced long distances and considerable expense to transport them to the school bus. Government transportation subsidies were inadequate. About 24 percent of children attended boarding school; half of these were facing withdrawal due to the expense. Recommendations for meeting rural needs are offered. Appendix contains the survey instrument; a list of types of available public assistance; and background information on the region's wool and beef production, rainfall, debt levels, and educational attainment. (SV)

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RC 020412

THINGS ARE CROOK IN THE BUSH: REPORT ON A NEEDS ANALYSIS SURVEY ON A SELECTED REGION THE CENTRAL WESTERN QUEENSLAND

J Seabrook — Australia

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The project which resulted in the report "Things are Crook in the Bush" was made possible by the contributors of the Central Western grazing community. We thank them for their responses and comments. We wish to acknowledge the significant role of Careforce, the ABC and the DPI, Longreach in instigating and supporting this project.

Our thanks go to the organisations who funded the Careforce Committee to design and produce the report. These funds also allowed follow up to occur by providing graziers with relevant information. Our thanks also to Julie Seabrook for compiling the data and producing the report.

Respondents congratulated Careforce on their initiative to find out what the situation is really like, and for their care and concern in an environment perceived to be insensitive to their needs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The rural downturn resulting from the drop in commodity prices and poor seasonal conditions raised concerns about how people were coping in the bush. A survey of grazing properties in the Central West region showed just how crook things are.

The survey identified that many were not getting by and that families are in a state of distress particularly regarding their future prospects. Sources of income are precariously fragile for some, with approximately half eating into savings, overdrafts or living off Government support. Many face looking for alternative sources of income off the property or leaving the land altogether.

Independent of people's perceptions of their financial state they were not confident of the future and were requesting information on other forms of assistance to cope with contingencies. Requests for assistance were of a practical or financial nature with very little interest shown in life issues.

The level of assistance currently being received is minimal however requests for assistance were enough to warrant investigation into people's awareness and ability to access schemes, benefits and other packages of assistance. People were not positive about dealing with agencies and felt that most of what was happening to them was beyond their control.

Education of children was a concern, placing financial strain on property income. Costs of transporting children to the school bus and costs associated with educating children away meant 11% were faced with the actual or threat of withdrawal of children from school. Of grave concern to people was their ability to educate children on the property given their skills and time available to devote to school work. Citing the possible escalation of this figure, maintenance of the highest education standards possible are an imperative.

Perhaps the most revealing of all were the comments made by people about their situation and its effects on the family, the land and their stock. The future for most looked bleak however there existed a reserve of hope that seasonal rains would bring enough relief to keep going. Grazing families felt the future was unpredictable and that external conditions would dictate their future. Graziers have seen their stock die and the quality of stock deteriorate below a saleable asset. Those less drought affected felt relatively well off provided they had no debts and had reasonable equity in their property.

In the interests of sustaining a viable grazing community, the Careforce Committee recommends that industry and agencies plan and implement action to address the current and potential future problems facing Central Western Queensland.

SURVEY ORIGINS

During the current rural recession many welfare agencies and service clubs are raising funds to help those in need. Current indications are that demand for welfare services will substantially increase over the coming months.

In order to better plan activities and to more effectively cater for this demand the Longreach Careforce Committee undertook a survey of primary producers in the Central West to establish what these needs will be. The committee consists of members of the community, local government, church, and support and welfare services.

Funding for the project was provided by the following:

Careforce

United Mine Workers Oaky Creek Lodge

Oaky Creek Coal Pty Ltd

Members of the Cathedral Parish of Rockhampton

Cathedral Parish Man's Society

Burgowan Collieries Pty Ltd

United Mine Workers German Creek Lodge

United Mine Workers Burgowan Lodge

Central Queensland Rural Aid Committee

Queensland Drought Relief Appeal

DF & LET Fysh "Acacia Downs" Aramac

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

On the 20th July 1993, a blanket survey was distributed to all rural properties via Australia Post offices and agencies throughout the region, addressed "To the Grazier". These were sent to the Shires of Alpha, Jericho, Aramac, Winton, Longreach, Ilfracombe, Isisford, Blackall, Tambo and Barcoo.

The survey was designed with the advice and assistance of the Careforce committee and DPI and was inspected by a number of graziers that represented a sample of the population prior to being posted out. (See Appendix I)

Of the 1050 surveys distributed, 223 were returned representing a 21% response. The survey was able to:

- identify the current needs
- identify issues of concern, and
- determine how the community perceives the future

The response by Shire and as a percentage of the number of surveys posted is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1 RESPONSE BY SHIRE

SHIRE	SURVEY %	RESPONSE NO'S	SURVEYS POSTED	TOTAL % RESPONSE BY POST
Jericho	19	43	120	36
Barcaldine	10	22	110	20
Longreach	19	43	180	24
Blackall	13	28	190	15
Tambo	7	16	60	27
Barcoo	4	8	30	27
Isisford	1	2	40	5
Ilfracombe	2	4	30	13
Aramac	13	30	80	38
Winton	12	27	210	13
TOTAL		223	(1050)1090	

Note: 40 returns from the Post Office account for the difference in total

The response was extremely variable between shires with a range of 5 - 38 percent, with 3 shires responses totalling less than 15%.

The response rate is indicative of the high level of concern in the bush about the future and its prospects, and reflects the need for people to have their say about what is happening to them and to their properties.

The process of seeking the opinions of graziers, their families and employees would appear to be a legitimate picture of what is happening at a local level. Outside forces or forces beyond their

control are recognised as problems incapable of their attention, however what this survey does reflect is a picture of financial, family and on-property stress plus an indication of the future needs of the grazing community.

The report does not attempt to present the total picture of the grazing community or the full extent or ramifications of the drought affected population.

Due to the anonymous nature of the responses it is impossible to determine a profile of the respondents. Whether those most likely to respond to such a survey are in difficult circumstances or not would be pure speculation. There is therefore the possibility that the person who responded to the survey may not see a problem but there could be other members of the family with a different view.

(For further background information see Appendix 2 detailing demographics of the Central West region, major commodities, education and seasonal conditions.)

SURVEY ANALYSIS

This section of the report analyses the responses to survey questions and links basic categories and the comments respondents have made about their situation, to form a picture of the rural crisis in the Central West region.

FAMILIES ON PROPERTIES

The survey sample shows there is an average of 1.3 families per property with a range from 1 - 4 families living on property. The 223 responses represents 914 individuals and 284 families.

Table 4 charts the age range of children, youth and adults represented in this survey.

Table 2: Number each age group

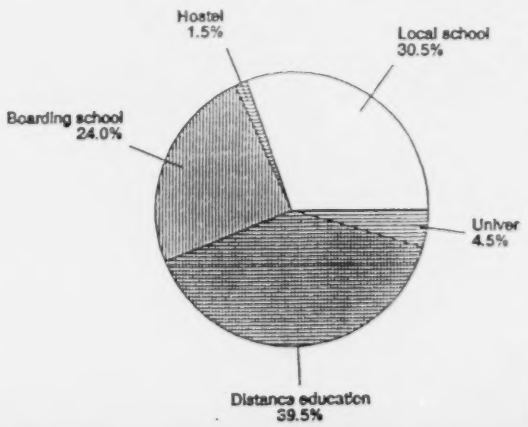
Age group	0 - 5	5-10	10 - 15	15 - 20	20 - 30	30 - 50	over 50
Numbers	117	98	70	44	128	278	179
% of total	13	11	8	5	14	30	19

It reveals that almost 50% of respondents are over 30 years of age. Pre-school and primary school age children constitute approximately a quarter of those on the survey properties. The declining proportion in the 10-15 and 5-20 year old bracket suggest absence at boarding school or university or seeking jobs outside the region.

EDUCATION

Approximately 200 (22%) individuals represented in the survey are school age children stressing the extent to which the current downturn could effect the education and future prospects of the area. Just over half (117 or 52%) of respondents have school age children on the property.

Diagram 1 reveals how school age children receive their education.



The majority of school age children are educated at or near home either at the local school or through the School of Distance Education (140 or 70%).

The number of children being educated at home through Distance Education (79 or 40%) reveals the potential level of stress placed on families facing drought conditions. The additional load of handfeeding stock and caring water erodes into time and attention paid to helping/supervising children with school work.

In addition the threat of, or actual withdrawal of children from boarding school (22 or 11%) and the transition to Distance Education schooling causes trepidation as to the time and ability of parents with an already full workload to educate their children at home.

A number of families face long distances and considerable expense to transport their children to the school bus (to take them to the local school). Up to 80 kms are travelled daily yet Government subsidy arrangements allow for only 3 km of travel. Of respondents with school age children 12% (24) requested financial assistance and 6% (12) practical assistance with their children's education. (See Forms of Assistance Diagram 3)

> This study has confirmed that during times of drought and rural downturn the cost of boarding school, costs of transport, the time to teach, and the skills for teaching children becomes a considerable burden.

There are links between this situation and the post compulsory training opportunities that will be available for these children in the region.

There is already a growing concern about the poor educational and skills profile of the population in the Central West. Treichel (1993) in his proposal for Community Centres of Continuing Education and Training says "A major factor inhibiting and stifling Central West Queensland's economic growth and development is the conspicuous absence of any social infrastructure to support the continuing education and training needs of its people.

Through a process of forced migration in the quest of higher agendas, the region has been denuded of its most valued potential resource — its youth! Rarely do those who venture eastward in search of educational opportunities return to contribute to their home region's economic and social development"

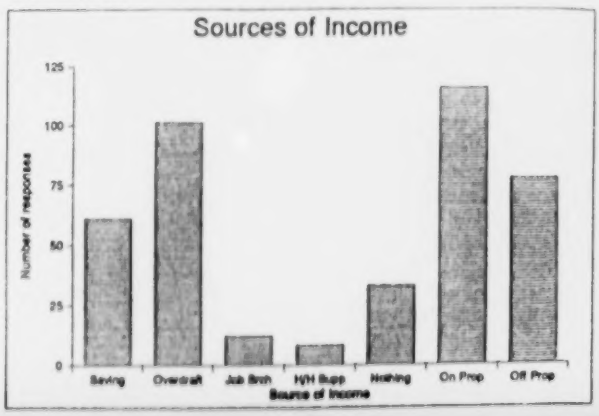
Participation in education opportunities remains the most significant barrier to further education according to Stejer (1993, Central West Remote Area Planning and Development Board). He questioned whether the regional population had the study skills and basic literacy levels to undertake further education.

The current downturn has the capacity to adversely affect the quality of the education of school children on properties. When combined with the capacity of the post compulsory training system in the region the issue becomes one of grave concern.

SOURCES OF INCOME

Diagram 2 shows independent totals for various sources of income and the respondents perception of their financial state.

DIAGRAM 2



61 respondents are drawing on savings and 101 are utilising overdrafts. A small number (12) are living off Job Search Allowance and 8 off Household Support. A total Of 78 earn income through off-property employment. Approximately half (116) of the respondents felt they were getting by on property income with a smaller number (33) saying their income was basically nothing.

Key points for further analysis are therefore:

- utilising savings/overdrafts
- use of Government support schemes
- off-property employment
- the high proportion of people getting by.

UTILISING SAVINGS/OVERDRAFT

A high proportion (45% or 101) of respondents are living off overdraft facilities, several noting that they were approaching their limit. 27% or 61 are utilising savings or off farm investments to make ends meet. There was some overlap between these categories with 23 respondents (10%) utilising both avenues as sources of income. This means that a total of 138 respondents are using savings or overdraft or both.

Approximately 65% (144) of the respondents indicate that they are living off either savings, overdraft, Job Search Allowance, Household Support or any combination of these.

The majority of respondents are clearly earning insufficient income from their property to at best maintain status quo.

USE OF GOVERNMENT SUPPORT SCHEMES

Only a small number of respondents are receiving government support. Eighteen (8%) people are receiving Job Search Allowance or Household Support or both.

This may reflect either a lack of awareness of how these services can be accessed or a lack of need ad warrants further investigation.

OFF-PROPERTY EMPLOYMENT

There are seventy eight (78 or 35%) respondents earning an income off property. Comments indicate that if the rural downturn continues employment off property will become crucial to remaining viable.

As the rural downturn continues, increased competition for jobs in town ad a greater demand on agencies providing employment will occur.

USE OF THREE AVENUES OF INCOME

165 or 74% of respondents are living off savings and investments or overdraft or have some income from off-property employment. A further three (3) respondents are in receipt of Job Search Allowance or Household Support as a sole income. This leaves 55 respondents who are reliant solely on current property income.

This reveals a heavy dependence on income not immediately derived from the property business.

GETTING BY

In spite of this heavy dependence there is a level of optimism where people felt they were getting by. 116(52%) responses indicated that people felt they were getting by on property income. Indeed exactly half of these respondents (58) were utilising savings, investments or living off overdrafts. A further breakdown of this figure shows that 23 were living off savings, 26 off overdrafts and 8 off both savings and overdraft. Of the other half of this group of 116 who felt they were getting by on property income, twelve (12) had income from off-property employment. The remaining forty six (46) were reliant solely on current property income and felt they were getting by.

From the survey data a total of 55 respondents are reliant solely on current property income. It is worth noting that this leaves only 9 respondents in this category who feel they are not getting by.

People's assessment of their ability to get by appears to be largely independent of source of income and may reflect their confidence in their ability to manage the current situation.

A small number of respondents (33 or 8%) felt their income was "basically nothing". Only ten percent of this group (3) indicated they were reliant solely on current property income.

On analysing the data it was clear that respondents had different interpretations of what was meant by "getting by on property income" or "income was basically nothing". Responses to these categories probably reflected their current attitude to the situation they were facing rather than an objective measure of income or wealth.

FORMS OF ASSISTANCE

The bush survival myth is alive and well in the Central West. Many people thought that others were more likely to be worse off than themselves, OR that they would "weather" the drought and "get by".

Of those requesting information on 35 Government and Agency assistance packages available:

- Approximately 46% of those people requesting further information on assistance felt they were "getting by".
- 54% of those who requested information did not feel they were "getting by".
- 52% of those people requesting further information on assistance felt they had basically no income. 48% felt they had some income.

This suggests that independent of the respondents perception of their current financial state they are not confident of the future and are requesting information on other forms of asslstance to cope with contingencies.

Information on the Government/agency schemes, benefits, and other supports requested by respondent:

Farm Vehicle Concession	14
CAPELEC - Electricity Account Concessions	12
Land Rent Deferral	10
Drought Information and Fodder Register	8
Freight Subsidy Information	9
Drought Relief Queensland	7
Job Search Allowance	4
Drought Declaration Assistance	8
Business Advice for Rural Areas (BARA)	5
Farm Financial Counsellors	5
Drought Support Workers	4
Legal Aid	4
Farm Housing Support Scheme	2
Financial Social Support	2
Country Link' Social Security	2
QIDC - Rural Adjustment Scheme	3
Queensland Government Info Access Link (QDIAL)	1
Family Support Services	1
Lifeline	1
Ageline	1
Austudy	1
Assistance for Isolated Children	1
Queensland Housing Crisis Line	0
Crisis Care	0
Marriage Guidance	0

Women's Infolink	0
Domestic Violence	0
Kids Help Line	0
Crisis Care 24 hr/7 day counselling	0
Women's Health Centre	0
Red Cross	0
Centacare	0
Youth Info Line	0
Drought Management Officers	0

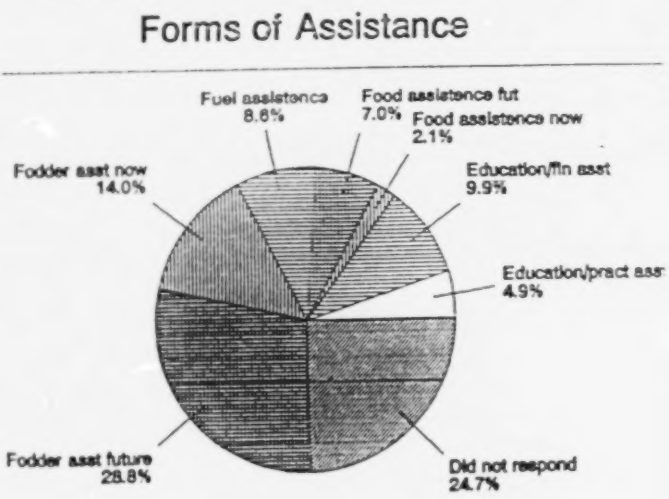
Note: These figures should not be interpreted as representing the needs of the total family on property.

The greatest number of requests for information are for property or financial assistance available either through concessions, subsidies or benefits. A small number requested information on personal supports available which is surprising given the amount of stress evident in the comments accompanying the survey. This may be due to the community support systems maintained by "bush" people, but may also be due to the sense of hope lingering for the on coming season with the accompanying desire for back up security should physical support be required.

SPECIFIC TYPES OF ASSISTANCE

A breakdown of the forms of assistance relating to education, food, transport, fuel water and fodder requested by respondents is displayed in Diagram 3.

DIAGRAM 3



There were 183 requests for assistance either now or in the future. The utility of the specific forms of assistance are discussed below.

FOOD

Food donations are considered the least practical forms of assistance. "It makes you feel dreadful when you've been independent for so many years and then when people offer help one feels like we're taking and your pride feels like it's taken. Especially when one has been a willing giver to others over the years".

The idea of specific donation support is more difficult to accept as being too personal and demeaning to accept. Broad based support however, from government or cash donations from independent agencies is considered far more impersonal and therefore acceptable to many respondents.

As in the encapsulated quote above, the method of providing assistance is a complex issue. To understand this there needs to be a recognition of the enormous contribution made by "bush" people to the quality of life of their communities without the benefit of the enormous infrastructure of larger regional centres or cities. This traditional support of community comes at a personal and financial cost, substituting in effect the public/private agency role and domain.

This way of life of sustaining and maintaining the communities in which they live is anti thetical to accepting from others with the "shoe on the other foot".

There is an overwhelming uncertainty about the future, particularly in the next 18 months to two years which could see many people leave the land without future prospects.

Given this, people are unsure of their position in 6 months or 12 months time and while 2.1% (5) indicated they needed food assistance now, 7% (17) indicated they may need some food assistance in the foreseeable future.

TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE

23 or 10% of respondents with a disability or medical problem indicated they needed regular transport or other types of assistance. A number of these also required assistance for fuel.

21 or 8.6% requested assistance to purchase fuel for the following variety of reasons:

- pumping water
- carting water
- check watering points, fencing and stock
- carting fodder
- making stock feed
- feeding stock
- lighting plant
- school run
- attending education function
- medical treatment
- off property work
- domestic use

This form of assistance was seen as practical and helpful to off-set expenses for running the property and maintaining basic living standards.

WATER

At present 41% of properties (91) are carting water and 14% (32) will have to do so in the near future. Some have been carting water for 18 months.

The high number of respondents who commented on the relief that rain would bring to easing the burden on property and their current financial situation, depicts the significant contribution carting water makes to the pressure on income and sense of survival. The large numbers of stock that have perished indicate a reliance on water, or purchase of fuel to pump water, as an imperative to the recovery from the current situation suffered by many.

FODDER

Properties are hand feeding stock with either supplements or stock feed. Of the 99 or 44% of respondents hand feeding stock, 34 or 15% indicated they required fodder assistance now. More significant perhaps is that whether people indicated they were or were not currently hand feeding stock, 31% or approximately a third of total respondents (70) said they were likely to require fodder assistance in the near future. This charts the future uncertainty of seasonal conditions and reveals the primary source of need of people who wish to remain viable on property. This switches thought from feeling relatively OK about hand feeding stock at the moment, to a feeling of possible need in the future.

This leads to the conclusion that without significant rain the rural decline will deepen requiring some form of fodder and other assistance in the region.

The poignant comments made by property families reflect the human side of the rural downturn. It makes good sense to heed their word so that we and you, the policy makers can get it right by providing the right sort of assistance at the right time in the most appropriate way.

BANKS AND AGENTS

- We can survive if banks and agents get off our back. We are being penalised for destocking.
- (Banks) are only concerned with getting their money.
- (We) could about break even with 50% interest subsidy.
- We are battling along and managing now – if interest rates were to increase we will go under.
- We've been able to pay all bills by falling behind with payments to the Bank.
- If Government would stop cutting services and increasing charges, a lot more would be able to survive.
- Constant insecurity is caused by changes in Government policy.
- The Government hasn't given us any security to fight back.
- We have been very disappointed with the RAS.
- Have applied for JSA (Job Search Allowance) but as yet they have not made a decision. That was back in May.
- People who go into debt and look for alternative employment seem to be penalised when it comes to receiving assistance.
- Cannot obtain "farmers dole" — assets make us non-eligible.
- Farm household support should be a grant in extreme exceptional circumstances.
- I have found that when I have looked into the assistance available the red tape and time involved before you get anything is unbelievable. For job search allowance it took almost 4 months to be approved!!
- We need Government policy makers to come and see and listen to those who make their living out of the land, before we have change for changes sake.
- My concern is the tax that will hit me due to the forced sale of cattle because of dry conditions — I realise I can offset this over a few years but it still hits hard.
- Is there some help for graziers over 60 with assets but no income.
- There should be something done about getting businesses going through another party which is concerned about Australia's future.
- Where are the incentives to be productive.

DEBT LEVEL

- Debt level is almost at present property value (little equity) - all due to devastating interest rates.
- We have managed to pay off our debt when the wool prices were high, but have not amassed any savings and are about to reach the stage of requiring a loan/overdraft until the next wool cheque. If our income remains the same and prices rise, we will be put in this situation earlier each year.
- I believe we will have to sell out as the debt situation at the present moment is getting worse due to interest rates and low wool prices.
- We have used every resource from our family's funds to keep going.
- I have cashed a final super fund I had but this is finished as I used it for carry on funds.
- All available cash has been paid back into the property. The very year we'd planned to pay out our debt (the floor price fell) since then everything has been a nightmare. To maintain viability we've had to sell whatever assets to wait in hope for rain, a few good seasons to pull us out.
- Costs are all rising and our commodity prices aren't.

On a small property this rapidly erodes any margin of profit.

- If the drought continues into next year our position will become very serious as we will have a big reduction in income and will run out of equity next year.
- Combined farm and off farm money covers bank overdraft interest and fuel and electricity only.
- After this wool cheque we have no real income for at least the next 6 months.
- By doing some outside contracting to supplement my income I am able to survive the current situation.
- Cattle and off farm investments keep business trading.
- Family may soon have to live apart to obtain off property work.
- Feeding and agistment costs at present are being met by off farm investments.
- We will manage because we budget.
- At the moment we are getting by and managing to gradually pay off some bills that have been owing for some time.
- We are very fortunate to have a small second income

which is our bread and butter as we go further and further into debt.

- All unnecessary expenditure curtailed.
- We cut costs as far as possible and live off savings to a certain decided point. If the prospects have not improved we will leave the industry.

EFFECTS OF DROUGHT

- The drought has decimated our flock, we have done all we can to protect the land.
- (We have) no cattle to sell for income, they are too poor. Spending lots of money on fodder to keep them alive.
- The ongoing worry is not having saleable cattle to meet ($) commitments.
- Stock will die before water runs out.
- Both blocks, almost 50,000 acres are completely destocked apart from a handful of sheep and cattle I am undertaking to maintain.
- Approximately 7000 sheep destroyed.
- 4000 sheep destroyed.
- Have lost 4 000 sheep in drought since last shearing. Have all our cattle on agistment in NSW.
- Stock losses have been heavy and return to profitably will depend on wool prices and a couple of good seasons to rebuild stock numbers.
- 1993-1994 will be difficult as sheep and cattle have been forward sold because of failed seasons.
- We still have our sheep on the property but are on the road droving our cattle.
- Men are on the road droving cattle. I have been left on the place to check waters for remaining cattle.
- Cattle are on agistment and we are going to be unable to meet interest payments next year.
- Restocking sheep after drought breaks will be biggest problem to re establish cash flow.

- So much maintenance work and renewal of plant not being done or happening.
- This is our fourth two year drought in ten years, this one being the worst dry period.
- The shearers are desperately worried about their jobs next year.
- The main issue is stress/management/mental health counselling.
- I pray to God every day to help our family and take away this drought, stress, family upheaval, worry, due to Bank repayment which CANNOT be met under the current wool, sheep, cattle, rural downturn. I just wish someone can help families like ours so we can pull through this.
- I feel everything is closing in and that we are slowly losing everything we have worked so hard for.
- High stress levels being experienced — zero leisure time.
- Constant pressure on the adults is reflected by the kids(poems, letters, statements).
- We have been in the industry for 30 years starting very small and slowly over the years getting together an economic enterprise. We are now back to a day to day future.

FODDER ASSISTANCE

- If there was government assistance over a broad base I would most likely apply for assistance.
- Any assistance is always a help but I think people in the bush tend to think there is always someone more needy than themselves and therefore decline a lot of assistance they could really use. This particularly relates to food aid and cash donations. I don't think less personal assistance such as fodder drops and interest subsidies would be declined.
- We are not eligible for any assistance.
- Restocking assistance will be valuable when the drought breaks.
- We may require fodder assistance if the drought continues.
- Recent rain has given relief from hand feeding and pumping but will not last more than two months.
- Fodder assistance is relative to when, if and how muchrain falls.
- we will be mustering soon and hay is too expensive to feed the weaners.
- Very much appreciate what assistance is being given by service clubs.
- I recently received hay from fodder train that passed through which was a godsend for our weaners. Have just received 170 points of rain which has put green shoots in the buffel and spinifex.
- There are a lot of genuine cases of need out there in the bush.

EDUCATION

- We drive 80 km a day to take our children to the schoolbus. Travel allowance is the same amount for travelling 3 km to bus as is 80 km.
- We may need some assistance to educate our three children if things don't improve in the coming years.
- We hope we won't need assistance but it is possible. So far we have always managed to pay fees, all be it in dribs and drabs.
- Our largest expense at the moment is education. With very low income, a relaxation of the assets test for Austudy would be of great benefit.
- Because of our isolation and distance from town, we receive financial assistance to send our child to boarding school. We hope this source of assistance (Govt) continues, if it were stopped we would have to bring our child home from school.
- I am unable to give my child undivided attention with her school work (School of Distance Education) as farm work demands attention.
- If it does not rain by September we don't see much future and our children will not be able to go to boarding school and I feel I am not able to teach high school well enough.
- I feel that children and their education are the innocent victims of this drought.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

- I don't see any future.
- Pretty bleak.
- Very unsure.
- It will be another tough year.
- Things are getting frightening and I fear the future doesn't hold a lot for us.
- Grim! For people looking toward retirement, shocking interest rates.
- The future is about as predictable as the weather.
- We'll all be relieved when it is all settled - one way or the other.
- I do not see any future for our children on the property or in the area.
- My husband does not encourage our son to seek a future on the property. We cannot see a viable future on the land.
- The future is scary - our effective working life is limited. We wonder should our kids go now and establish some other career or should they hang on in the hope that we don't lose all before we can recover enough to hand over to them. If it wasn't for the kids we would probably have sold out by now.
- 1994 will be a watershed for the wool industry and those dependent solely on it.
- No recovery in industry or Nation until wool prices rise well above cost of production.
- So long as interest rates don't rise dramatically and cattle prices don't crash we will continue to manage.
- We have put all our energy, time and resources into ourproperty. Bad prices make things difficult, we want to hold on - the threat of World Heritage Listing (of Lake Eyre Basin) hanging over our heads is too much to bear.
- Unless commodity prices increase and costs decrease it will be very difficult for this property to prosper.
- Long term - the wool industry will survive and prosper. Short term - no worthwhile rain in 93 will create a huge problem. Rain first then fix the commodity prices.
- We'll be alright if decent rains fall.
- Nothing that 6 inches of water won't fix to survive OK.
- With recent rains we will get by for several months.
- We have no idea what the future holds as our stock die and we have very little water.
- If it doesn't rain soon things will be very tight by the end of the year as our income and resources will be severely depleted.
- Please God let it rain soon.
- Our future will be decided by the seasons.
- If spring rains are not forthcoming, things could become precarious.
- At present we feel we can hold ground but if economic and seasonal conditions continue into 94 things will become extremely difficult. Even if both improve, the cost of restocking will still present problems.

- We require substantial summer rains and considerable improvement in wool prices for us to return to viability.
- We feel that if given two good years of reasonable seasons and reasonable prices we will be able to stay on the land. Failing that we have little option but to go.
- If things don't improve by this time next year we won't be here.
- At the moment we are getting by. However by the way things are going, 6-12 months down the track could see us rolling our swags and putting roo in the stew.
- I am a lucky one.
- I've been through it before and probably will again, hopefully I'll manage to "hang in" through the bad times.
- Our area has been fortunate enough to get enough rain to keep our stocking rates at somewhere near normal. Although the situation has been getting tighter we should be OK.
- We are very fortunate to have been less drought stricken than most and to have cash assets and stock and no debts.
- Things will pick up in a couple of years.
- As we have created jobs off farm we have been able to carry on, although we both have a very heavy workload. If either of our jobs cease we will leave the area.
- We are confident things will improve - if we can hang on.
- Things are pretty tough but we feel that others are worse off.
- We are lucky not to have school age children and to be reasonably healthy. We can make it for a year or two yet, after that it is in the lap of the Gods.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

BANKS AND AGENTS

People expressed hostility toward banks and felt that government policy changes contributed to the Worsening situation. Generally people were disappointed with Government assistance packages due to restrictions and anomalies in the eligibility criteria, plus the time taken to receive assistance.

DEBT LEVELS

Debt level is getting worse due to interest rates and low wool prices. To maintain properties people are eating into their savings and overdrafts. Many are bordering on becoming non viable or leaving the property altogether. Loss of on property income is forcing people to seek further off-farm income to service debts or maintain viability or to merely subsist. A number say they are getting by due to off-farm investments/income or through budgeting measures.

EFFECTS OF DROUGHT

The health of stock is declining due to drought conditions and significant losses have occurred. Saleability of cattle is poor and destocking on sheep properties is significant. A number are droving cattle or have stock on agistment. Return to profitability is dependent on an improvement in prices, the number of good seasons and the ability to restock. In some cases on property maintenance had ceased. High stress levels are experienced by all members of the family through constant pressure and concern for an unknown future.

FODDER ASSISTANCE

The need for assistance "is relative to when, if and how much rain falls". If assistance was available people would apply though at present many felt there were others worse off than themselves.

EDUCATION

The cost factor of educating children is significant and if the current situation did not improve then assistance to educate children would be sought. Although travel allowance is perceived as inadequate, other schemes are considered essential to maintaining children at school. There is uncertainty regarding parents ability to assist children with education at home should their children be withdrawn from school.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

For the majority of people the future looks bleak and uncertain, yet for others there is hope. People do not feel there is a future for their children on the property. They feel the future is unpredictable and that external conditions will dictate their future either seasonally or through industry returns. Rain is considered the first priority followed by commodity prices to raising the prospects for the future. However if things do not improve a number said they will be "rolling their swags" and leaving the land. In less drought stricken areas optimism exists where people have assets, no debt and stock. A number say they could hang on for another two years in the faith that things will pick up in the short to medium term.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. No one agency bears the sole responsibility for addressing the issues of the rural downturn and its effects upon an industry and it's people. The provision of assistance is currently at a maximum but clearly is not providing the level of relief that is required, nor is it being accessed as evidenced by the number of requests for information on avenues of assistance.

   The low level of utilisation of Government schemes warrants further investigation to ascertain why they are not being accessed. Are people aware of what is available to them and do they know how to go about getting what they need?

   Agencies providing assistance need to be better co-ordinated and more proactive in advising grazing families of assistance opportunities and social service benefits available to them.

   Issue: Observing the balance between creating dependency on subsidies and schemes and assisting the industry to overcome the current downturn to ensure their return to viability.

   Issue: To apply both objective and subjective measurers to the current and future position of people in the industry.

2. Education costs are cited as a major expense for families who due to their isolation are required to send their children away to be educated or who need to travel long distances to the local school or who need to invest the time to supervise children at home.

   For government and non government agencies, as service providers and decision makers, to ensure it is "everybody's business" that the highest possible standards of education are maintained by monitoring children living on properties or away at school.

3. The evidence of stress and insecurity expressed in the comments identify the extent to which commodity prices and seasonal conditions effect the future prospects of the Central west grazing community.

   The economic and social ramifications of the current situation will create a watershed in the industry with severe implications on the shape and nature of this community and the region as a whole.

   For the community to resolve to take a pro active role in the regeaon process by contributing local knowledge to facilitate property build up to carry agricultural establishments into the future.

4. It is inevitable that the health and well being of people will continue to deteriorate without the means to fight back. The degree to which people can combat stress and strengthen the support systems will determine their ability to survive under difficult conditions.

   To provide grazing families with the tools and the skills to escape fatalistic mind sets by utilising the support and

welfare agency networks in the western and central region of Queensland.

5. Comments indicate that if the rural downturn continues, employment off property will become crucial to maintaining property viability. It will also be a consideration for people adjusting off the land as a way of staying in the region. This will place a great strain on the job providers and employment services in a market place that will be potentially looking for skilled workers.

   To investigate the provision of services and infrastructure for further education and training to reskill people expected to come onto the job market.

6. Income levels are dangerously low in the region with many people living off negative incomes. Unfortunately this is an indication of a precarious financial position and understandably there is insecurity about the future.

   To adopt a innovative approach to the handling ad treatment of debt by financial institutions and agencies with benefit schemes.

7. It is evident that if there is no significant rain in the near future, fodder assistance will be of vital importance to almost half the graziers who responded to the survey.

   Preparation for fodder assistance to the region must get under way. Consultation with south west agencies involved in recent fodder drops may provide information on appropriate process, timing and methods of distribution.

IMPLEMENTATION

To combat the affects of the rural downturn in the Central West region the required efforts and resources must come from three groups. Firstly the graziers themselves to instigate change and work in partnership with agencies. Secondly, non government agencies who as support and service delivery bodies are the interface between policy makers and the community. Thirdly the government and planning bodies who manage response and change but who also influence the structural environment.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY 1

The three parties establish a working group to develop an integrated approach to address the short and medium term issues and develop further the recommendations and implementation strategies contained within this report.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY 2

An implementation plan be prepared in conjunction with industry, government and non government groups encompassing these and further recommendations.

Short term implementation strategies:

- access to information on assistance
- instigate local community property management and viability workshops
- monitor education standards of school age children at home or away at school
- provide counselling and advisory services
- investigate an innovative approach to debt

Medium term strategies:

- develop training and vocational education services in the region
- provide fodder assistance

REFERENCES

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Steier, R.A., *Remote Area Development: What is being done in Central Western Queensland?*, Central Western Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development Board, Longreach, 1993.

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Appendix

1. Property Location (Nearest Town).....
2. Number of families on property.....
3. Number in each age group.
   0 to 5.....5 to 10.....10 to 15.....15 to 20
   20 to 30.....30 to 50.....over 50
4. Present sources of income: (tick each option)
   1) Living off savings or off farm investments.....Yes/No
   2) Living off overdraft.....Yes/No
   3) Job Search Allowance.....Yes/No
   4) Household support.....Yes/No
   5) Basically nothing.....Yes/No
   6) Getting by on property income.....Yes/No
   7) One or more family members working off-property.....Yes/No
5. (a) Are there school aged children on the property? Yes/No (tick one)
   (b) If yes: how are they obtaining their education?(Give Numbers).....
   1. Local school.....
   2. Staying in hostel to attend school in regional centre.....
   3. Boarding school.....
   4. School of Distance Education.....
6. Have you been obliged to withdraw children from school early, or changed method of education (eg. boarding school to Distance Ed.) for financial reasons?.....Yes/No (tick one)
7. (a) If No do you anticipate having to do so over the next 12 months? Yes/No (tick one)
   (b) If yes, would you be interested in obtaining assistance with your children's education?
   Financial Yes/No (tick one)
   Practical (Trained home tutor) Yes/No (Tick One)
8. (a) Do you require food assistance?
   Now Yes/No (Tick one)
   In the foreseeable future Yes/No (Tick one)
   (b) If yes when will this be required? .....(approx. month)
9. Possible transportation to property for food aid if required? (eg mail run).....
10. Are there any people on the property with a disability or medical problem who need regular transportation or other assistance? Yes/No (Tick one)
11. (a) Do you require assistance to purchase fuel? Yes/No (Tick One)
    (b) If yes what will be used for?.....
12. (a) Are you presently carting or pumping water? Yes/No (Tick one

(b)If No, will you have to cart or pump water in the near future if worthwhile rains are not received? Yes/No (Tick one)

13. (a) Are you hand feeding stock? Yes/No (Tick one;

(b)If Yes, do you require fodder assistance? Yes/No (Tick one;

14. Are you likely to require fodder assistance in the near future? Yes/No (Tick one

15. Do you wish to add any comments on your present situation or what you believe the future holds for you .....

.....

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE.

THE FOLLOWING ARE AVENUES OF ASSISTANCE WHICH ARE AVAILABLE.

1. Farm housing Support Scheme
2. Job Search Allowance
3. Financial Social Support
4. Drought Support Workers
5. Queensland Government Info Access Link (QDIAL) 6 Countrylink"Social Security
7. Family Support Services
8. Queensland Housing Crisis line
9. Crisis care
10. Lifeline
11. Marriage Guidance
12. Women's Infolink
13. Domestic Violence
14. Legal aid
15. Kids Help Line
16. Crisis Care 24 hr,7 day Counselling Service 17. Women's Health Centre
18. RedCross
19. Centrecare
20. Ageline
21. LegalAid
22. Youth Info line
23. Austudy
24. Assistance for isolated children
25. Capelec - Electricityy Account Concessions
26. Business advice for rural areas (BARA)
27. Farm Financial Counsellors
28. Drought Declaration Assistance
29. QIDC — Rural Adjustment Scheme
30. Land Rent Deferral
31. Farm vehicle concession
32. Drought Relief Queensland
33. Drought Info and fodder register
34. Drought Management Officers
35. Freight Subsidy Information

Would you like further information on any matter mentioned above? Yes/No (Tick one)

(a) If Yes what topic .....

(b) And/or would you like to a contacted regarding your present situation? Yes/No (Tick one)

If you answered yes to either (a) or (b), please fill out the details below.

Name .....

Address .....

Phone .....

Signature .....

NOTE: THIS INFORMATION IS STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.

Please return completed questionnaire in the enclosed envelope by Friday, 6th August to:

The Chairman,

Careforce Committee,

Longreach. Qld. 4730

APPENDIX 2

CENTRAL WEST REGION

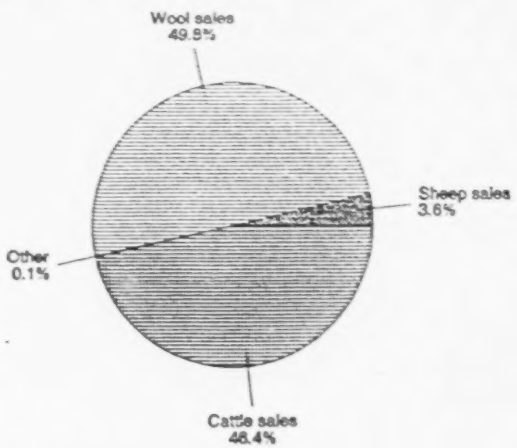
The Central West Region is characterised by it's reliance upon the grazing industry and its relative isolation from heavily populated centres.

The region selected for this survey is a area which is geographically huge and sparsely populated covering 214606 square kilometres with a resident population of 13732 people.

The two major commodities produced in the region are wool with 49.8% and beef with 46.4% of the total commodity production value (CW Stat Div.)

Value CW Primary Production Commodities

DIAGRAM 4



This reliance makes it particularly vulnerable to any downturn experienced in the industry, as at the current time. Liam Ryan (Central Queensland Regional Economic Development Strategy, UCQ 1993) notes this is a classic duel economy in terms of commodity production with an almost complete absence of value adding in the primary production sphere.

SHEEP AND CATTLE

TABLE 3 CW Demographics and Production

Shire	Area Sq Km	Resident Pop (a)	No. of prop.	Numbers ('000) Sheep/Cattle		Gross $000 Prod' Wool/Beef	
Aramac	23232	1 082	90	673	58	13076	4686
Barcaldine	8430	1 821	59	459	29	7923	3782
Barooo	61 901	482	55	459	116	8729	19909
Blackall	16304	2 164	90	716	59	15789	8287
Ilfracombe	6566	318	36	426	5	8074	335
Isisford	10 528	373	37	448	20	6718	2217
Longreach	23 517	3 975	107	1143	63	22229	13 514

Tambo	10308	683	53	415	42	8939	6244
Winton	53 820	1 747	120	1 220	127	23580	18 156
Jericho	21717	1087	105	8	141	31	20366
GWQLD	236323	13732	752	5967	660	115088	97496
(% of Qld)	14%	0.5%	6%	34%	7%	32%	14%
Total Qld	1 727000	2676765	13482	17440	9 856	355 136	680999

*at 30 June 1987

*1987/90

There are a total of 754 agricultural establishments in the Central West region operating 752 properties. Numbers of stock in the region total 5 967 000 sheep and 660000 cattle. Gross value of wool production is $115 million and beef disposals is $97.5 million.

DEBT LEVELS

PA Newman (1993) shows that average debt levels for producers with debt in July 1993 were $323 000 ($34 per dry sheep equivalent) with an equity rate of 75%. The downturn in wool prices which have fallen considerably since 1990 have had a subsequent impact on equity levels.

It is predicted that in 1993/94, significant cash losses will be experienced by large proportions of wool growers in western Queensland.

Strategies employed by producers since 1990 to help survive the wool market downturn were identified in Newmann (1993). These have included:

- Cost cutting (70%)
- Altering enterprise risk/other opportunities (50%)
- Off property work (30%)
- Liquidate reserves (5%)
- Expand (5%)

About 12% of producers had indicated that they would have to sell part or all of their property if things did not improve in the next couple of years.

He found that economies of scale were evident in that the economic performance and efficiency for larger holdings exceeded that for smaller holdings.

WOOL

L Ryan states that wool, produced predominantly for export contributes exports valued in excess of $3 billion for Australia. The CW region accounts for 34% of the total QLD production in 1990/91. Wool is the staple industry for some shires. For example of the total value of commodities produced, wool accounts for 93% in Ilfracombe, 70% in Aramac and 60% in Longreach Shire.

In the early 1990's the demand for wool was drastically reduced due to the international political and economical environment. This produced a dramatic increase in the wool stockpile. The floor price of wool was reduced from 870c/kg clean to 700c/kg and subsequently abolished allowing prices to drop to an all time low price of 428c/kg. The current commodity price is 440c/kg.

Although prices have improved they are not expected to reach 1980's historically high levels.

Production of wool is forecast to continue falling until the mid 1990's due to the combined effects of sheep numbers and dry seasonal conditions. ABARE predicts production will stabilise in 1994-95 with a recovery to commence in 1997. It is predicted Queensland will experience a 17% fall in production in the 1992/93 season following on a 26% decline in 1991/92.

BEEF

The beef industry earned $2.4 million in Australian exports in 1990 and the domestic market accounts for 40% of production(L Ryan). Trends indicate that producers in Queensland are selling off their stock due to worsening seasonal conditions, however slow growth is expected over the medium term. Although meat processing currently takes place out side the region, potential opportunities have been identified for the establishment of small scale operations and the live sheep export trade from the Central West region.

RAINFALL

The region experiences enormous variation in rainfall from year to year and from place to place.

Winton's mean average rainfall is 410 mls with a standard deviation of 195 mls with an average of 39 days of rainfall. Extremes on a 100 year record range from 88 - 1086 mls. The total number of severe droughts equal 14 in 108 years from 1884 to 1991.

Longreach mean rainfall is 429 mls with a standard deviation of 196 with an average of 40 days of rainfall. Extremes on a 100 year record range from 109 to 1076 mls. The total number of severe droughts equal 16 in 100 years from 1893 to 1991. In the central west region property management must consider drought risk.

EDUCATION

The following is an extract from a study on select areas of the Mitchell Grass Downs regions in western Queensland by P. Newmann. It demonstrates education attainment and costs of education typical of the regions surveyed in the study.

Derived from information collected on the Longreach Mitchell Grass area, 94% of husbands were not educated beyond senior level or pastoral college while 53% did not complete senior studies.

For wives, 53% were not educated beyond senior level while 29% did not complete senior studies. 41% completed studies beyond senior while for husbands this was only 6%.

These figures highlight the low level of formal educational attainment for rural producers.

On average, 1.2 child was educated per property per year with 47% of the sample having to pay significant sums of money to educate their children away fro n the property.

The average estimated expense per property per year was $6389 while for properties with children it was $ 13577 per annum.